Party, to command a majority, and succeeded Mr. Cosgrave as President of the Executive Council. Once more, after a ten years' lull, Anglo-Irish relations became strained. The tariff reform controversy had rattled its bones; the cry of'The Pope on the rates!' had again been faintly heard in the land, and now the greatest preoccupation of pre-war politics—the Irish question—was resurrected. Like an expiring conjurer, parliamentary Government seemed determined to give a last performance of all its best-known tricks.

Mr. de Valera's abolition of the oath of allegiance and, to all intents and purposes of the office of Governor-General and other constitutional irregularities, were not at first taken too seriously. The strength of Imperial relationships, it was often said, like the strength of the Church of England, lay in their flexibility and lack of definition. They were so elastic that they could not be broken, so loosely defined that they could not be contravened.

A more serious view was taken of Mr. de Valera's refusal to pay the land annuities[8] when they fell due, since this involved the British Government in a financial loss. Imperial relations and Anglican dogma might be all the better for being vague, but where cash was concerned, precision was essential.

The Minister technically responsible for dealing with Mr. de Valera's default on the land annuities, was Mr. J. H. Thomas, the Dominions Secretary; but in the negotiations and conversations which ensued, he was rarely unaccompanied by at least one of his Conservative colleagues. The breezy, colloquial manner which suited friendly, but unimportant, exchanges

with Australian or Canadian politicians, was inadequate, it was felt, for handling a situation which involved the obstinate fears of Ulster and the romantic susceptibilities of Southern Ireland, as well as some millions of pounds sterling. What could be better, in inaugurating a telephone service with Australia, than to begin

[8] In 1903 it was decided to buy out Irish landlords and transfer their land **to** the tenants in occupation, who were to repay the purchase price of their holdings in the form of annuities spread over 63 years. The transaction involved the issue of stock guaranteed by the British Government.